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ABSTRACT

This speech addresses the restructuring of special and regular education into one integrated system in a third generation of school reform. Six serious issues demonstrate the need for reform: (1) poor quality of disability identification and evaluation; (2) a classification system governed by fads rather than student needs; (3) minimal mainstreaming of students with mild to moderate disabilities; (4) funding problems; (5) ambivalence by professionals concerning parent involvement; and (6) lack of positive data regarding student outcomes. The two previous generations of school reform focused, first, on raising standards and then on teacher empowerment and site-based management. The third generation of reform must focus on the student as the primary producer of educational outcomes and reject the premises that instructional needs warrant a dual system of education, that this dual system is efficient, and that students with disabilities are a separate and needy group. A new view of students must emphasize the continuum of student abilities, student outcomes, and the active engagement of students in their own learning. Labels for students must be discontinued and all students served in an inclusive environment. School administrators can lead the way by challenging teachers and fostering an inclusive environment. (Contains 23 references.) (DB)

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RESTRUCTURING SPECIAL EDUCATION: THE THIRD GENERATION OF SCHOOL REFORM

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Let me begin my comments today by thanking you for the invitation to speak to your group and to warn you ahead of time that I intend to use you as a sounding board for some of my new thinking about the nature of special education and how these new ideas can be incorporated into some of the things I have been doing over the last two decades. One of the expectations of a sounding board is that something will come back. It is my hope that you will feel free to criticize my ideas and offer some of your own. I believe that only with this kind of dialogue will those of us engaged in working on behalf of children with disabilities be successful in our efforts.

We should look with great pride, in what I am sure should be called the modern era of education for the handicapped, on the achievements that were precipitated by Public Law 94-142. You do not have to be very old to appreciate how far we have come. Many handicapped children had never seen the inside of a public school. Any services that were available probably were organized and financed by concerned parents. Many children had been warehoused in institutions with little or no service. Children with disabilities who did manage to attend the public schools were often ill-treated, excluded from a variety of learning opportunities, provided inferior instructional materials, facilities, and unqualified teachers. Into this situation came a piece of legislation that required service for all handicapped children. The operational word was obviously *all*. It came on the heels of a larger civil rights movement and can be said to have helped define the political climate that we live in today.

To suggest that we develop special education for this large and diverse group of children was almost impossible to contemplate. Yet here we are less than 20 years later with an extensive array of programs and services and one of the most sophisticated delivery systems ever devised for the public schools. Every day, millions of children with disabilities are transported to school where they receive individualized programs using specially designed

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instructional materials, in specially designed or modified facilities, all provided by a highly qualified corps of professional educators and related personnel. These accomplishments are very important and each of us should take our own measure of pride for the role that we played. Even so, and in the face of these very real accomplishments, there has been a gathering storm. We are all aware, and have been for some time, that there are a number of fundamental issues about this system of special education that we have designed and how effective it has ultimately proven to be. There should be no surprise in the fact that a system this complex would need to undergo revision as we gain experience and have the opportunity to evaluate the various outcomes. What has come as a surprise to me is that it has taken us so long to begin the change process and that there is so much resistance to the needed change. It is not as though we do not have some compelling evidence. We do. The body of research literature suggesting the need to reevaluate some of the basic premises of special education, its structure and practices, has been accumulating for a number of years.

This part of my speech will be the gloom and doom part. Perhaps a little depressing, but I am afraid, necessary. The call for school reform did not begin in a vacuum. It was based on various perceptions, some accurate and some not so accurate, that something was wrong with the public schools. The organization of the schools, what the mission of the schools should be, what are the children learning, are the schools safe, what books should children read in schools, who is and who should be in charge of schools; all of these issues and many more were part of conversation that began to drive the school reform movement. Likewise, there are a variety of issues that have suggested the need for the reform of special education, something we originally began to call the regular education initiative (Will, 1986), but has now come to be called the restructuring of special education.

A number of important reports have provided a variety of perspectives about the ills that have befallen special education (Lipsky & Gartner, 1987; Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1984). However, all of the analyses are centered on *what* the problems are, not on whether there are problems. The debate at hand is clearly what, not whether. The summary of these issues that I have developed is designed to illustrate. I have tried to be representative, and I hope what I have identified speaks to the major issues that will need our attention. I have tried to be thorough, though I would in no way claim this to be a comprehensive review.

1. We have demonstrated that our evaluation systems produce results hardly better than the flip of a coin (Ysseldyke, et al., 1983). We continue to identify children as handicapped using tests and procedures in which professional examiners have no confidence. These various tests are unable to predict educational need, the only legitimate purpose that this kind of testing could have. Students with seemingly identical characteristics qualify for different programs depending on where they reside and how individuals on school staffs evaluate them (Lipsky & Gartner, 1987). You can literally change your handicap by moving from one school district to another.

2. Growth in certain categories of handicapping conditions has clearly become more a function of political pressure and professional fad than the characteristics and needs of students (Algozzine & Korinek, 1985). By some counts, the learning disability category grew more than 119 percent over a period of one decade (Edgar & Hayden, 1984-1985). This is added to research that suggests that over 80 percent of all normal children could be classified as learning disabled (LD) using the variety of definitions currently in use (Ysseldyke, 1987). Many of the children emerging as special needs children, and who are literally crying for our attention, the so-called at risk populations, do not fit any of our categories. In some cases we try to force these children into existing categories and many, unfortunately, go unserved entirely.

3. Our so-called mainstreaming efforts affect only about 5 percent of the mild to moderate category; an attempt that could hardly be called extensive (Sansone & Zigmond, 1986). Now, I know that mainstreaming without the regular teacher's support is doomed, but at the same time, this effort was not supposed to be voluntary. Regular teachers should be asked to do what is appropriate. We should not have to go to them with hat in hand and ask or plead with them to take a handicapped child in their rooms. I wrote an article in 1978 that I called The Case Against Mainstreaming, and it was not my case against, but rather spoke to the concern of beginning this process without the adequate preparation of regular teachers (Swartz, 1978). Work that I have since completed suggests that we have made little progress with our efforts to provide training to the regular teacher for work with special needs children (Swartz, Hidlago, & Hays, 1991). Still, I never envisioned at that time what has become a literal refusal by many regular teachers to participate in this process. But I do not really think we need a new rule here. I think the one we have is more than adequate. P. L. 94-142 requires as part of the least restrictive environment principle that children be removed from regular classes only when their need cannot be served in this environment. Now, certainly none of us believe that we are in any way applying this principle. Many of the placement decisions that we make have very little to do with the educational need of children. We know it, we put up with it, in many ways it makes our lives simpler.

4. I am sure none of you will be shocked to hear that funding and a wide variety of problems with our system of funding is on this list of problems. Starting with the obvious fact that we do not have enough funding; the problems with what we do have are considerable. First, the *we do not have enough* problem. I suspect that many of you have an interest in the topic of special education restructuring because of something we call the encroachment on general fund dollars. Special education continues to take more and more dollars from the general fund for its operation. This has become a fact of life in California. Second, our funding is tied to categories, and most suspect that this is related to our problem of overidentification. Third, we are given very little opportunity to use our money for prevention. We are restricted to intervention. Many suggest that this approach is a *wait until the problem gets worse* approach. Though I agree that we have a funding problem, I continue to maintain that it is what we are trying to fund, this dual system, that has made funding a problem.

5. The kind of parental involvement that we have with the education system both misleads parents (Guess, Benson, & Siegel-Causey, 1985) and ignores their capabilities (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1985). Let's be honest here for a moment. We talk about the fact that we want parental involvement; that much of our ultimate success rests on their willingness to support our efforts; but we do not really mean it. What we want are parents that will show up at the individualized education program (IEP) meeting. What we want are parents that will respond to our needs. For the most part I have found that lack of parental support is one of our easy excuses for a child's lack of success. What can you expect when you see so and so's mother or father, or perhaps some other comment about the child's living conditions. Now, an involved parent that wants to sit in on the class and see what the teacher is doing, a parent who has real suggestions to offer at the IEP meeting, one that is aggressive and perhaps even hostile, is another matter. We really do not want them to be that involved.

6. Unfortunately, none of Numbers 1 through 5 are really the bad news. The bad news is our data on student outcomes. We have evidence that strongly suggests that much of what we do in special education is no more helpful than if we were to leave handicapped children in the regular class and provide no services at all (Carlberg & Kavale, 1980). This data is not even new. What is astounding is that we are so slow to act on this evidence. I do not know about you, but it is hard for me to say after more than 20 years that much of what I have been doing might not be very useful. This is a rather disturbing thought. At the same time, it would be even more disturbing to think that I am going to continue to make these mistakes over and over again, rather than beginning the process of making the necessary changes and restructuring how we deliver services to handicapped children. We have very little to suggest that we should continue to do what we do, how we do it, even one more day. We are not certain at this point that we are operating on the standard that physicians have set for themselves, and that is, to first, do no harm.

Our success stories in special education, I am afraid, are few and far between (Gartner & Lipsky, 1992). We do not even use student outcomes as a measure of our success. Rather, we judge our efforts on issues of compliance. Are we adhering to the various laws and the rules and regulations that govern our service delivery? How convenient that we can avoid scrutiny on the results of what we do and how our programs affect the lives of children. The basic premise of special education is that students with deficits will benefit from a unique body of knowledge and from smaller classes staffed by specially trained teachers using special materials. However, there is no compelling evidence that segregated special education programs have significant benefits for students. On the contrary, there is substantial and growing evidence that goes in the opposite direction (Lipsky & Gartner, 1987).

We find that more than 47 percent of children with mild disabilities drop out of school by age 16 (Tenth Annual Report to the Congress, 1988). Of those who remain, less than half receive a regular diploma (Wagner & Shaver, 1989). In terms of life after school, studies indicate that a substantial percentage of students labeled handicapped are unemployed, live at home, and have few friends. Fewer than half of the students who had been out of school

for one year or more had found paid employment, and among those employed, less than 30 percent had full-time jobs. Even more disturbing is the report that less than one-third of the youth with disabilities who had been out of school for more than a year had not engaged in "any productive activity in that year," (Wagner & Shaver, 1989, p. 11). This sounds bad, but it's even worse when you find that the definition of productive activity included: not taking any courses from a postsecondary educational institution; not working for pay (full- or part-time), either competitively or in a sheltered environment; not engaging in a volunteer job or unpaid work; and not receiving job skills training, or if a female, not being married or reported to be involved in child rearing. In summary, we find that *not engaged in productive activity* translates into *doing nothing*. An extremely large number of youth with disabilities who have completed our special education programs are doing just plain nothing. This is not a rousing report of our success. This kind of data does not support the status quo. Quite the contrary, it is ample evidence of needed reform. If we cannot demonstrate the efficacy of our present structure, then it is clear to me that we need to revamp the system and restructure how we deliver services to a wide variety of special needs children.

Let's take a moment to look at various aspects of the push for school reform and what they might mean to us in special education. It has been suggested that the modern school reform movement has come in waves (Lipsky & Gartner, 1992). Each of these waves has been part of the political landscape of the time. I prefer to call these generations of reform because I believe that they have evolved one from the other and are never fully completed and that elements of each generation can be found in the next. There is always some residual from each reform effort that is left behind and continues to influence what we do long after the larger reform has been abandoned.

The first generation of school reform focused on a variety of external factors. Suggestions were made for higher standards that included strengthened graduation requirements, minimal competency testing, and the no pass/no play rule. All of these are examples of external factors that were frequently called for by parents and invariably found their way into the media. Other reforms having an external focus included mandated curricula and changing or strengthening teacher credentialing requirements (even competency testing for teachers; Exhibit A is, of course, the California Basic Education Skills Test [CBEST]). The external focus implied that whatever was wrong could be fixed by setting a new standard or developing a policy or requirement.

The second generation of reform was one that had the roles of adults as its specific focus. We have heard talk about teacher empowerment. Much effort has been expended on developing site-based management, and politicians are having a field day with the issue of parental choice. To be fair, it must be acknowledged that these reforms have resulted in considerable gains in student achievement and have positively impacted public attitude. Still, something is left undone by all of this. From my perspective, the major deficit in these reforms, efforts that were set off by *A Nation At Risk* (1983), and what seemed to be the unending flow of reports that followed, was that none of these reports addressed the needs

of children with disabilities. They were either ignored or their importance in the overall scheme of things was considered minimal. Well, I disagree. I believe that this generation of reform will fail for this very reason: all children and their needs are not given sufficient importance.

Most of us would reject health care reform that focused exclusively on the roles of doctors and hospitals. We expect that the focus will ultimately be on the patient or those of us who will need medical care. Likewise, reform of our justice system that focused on judges and lawyers would also very likely be rejected by the public. What we expect is concern or focus on those who will receive benefits from the various systems. The same, of course, will be expected from school reform. We cannot focus on the roles of teachers or other adults. We must make children central to any reform efforts.

What I believe to be the fundamental error in what we are doing is that special education is based on the premise that there are two major kinds of children or learners (Stainback, Stainback, & Bunch, 1989). Those that are normal learners and will require regular education, and those that are abnormal or handicapped and will require special education. This dichotomy is false and has lead to our present system of segregated education where the normal and so-called abnormal are only together under special and very controlled circumstances. This dual system of education has proven to be inappropriate. Doing away with this exclusionary practice is the only solution to our problem that I believe to be reasonable and likely to succeed. We must develop one single system of education that is designed to accommodate all learners. Even though these learners represent a continuum of strengths and weaknesses, they can be served in a unified way that provides for the full inclusion of all children and one where every child is assured success.

What is clearly called for, and one that is already under way, is a third generation of reform where the child, as student, is at the center of reform, rather than a variety of external factors or where adults and their roles are central. We will restructure education generally, and special education specifically, to shift focus from adult providers or the various debates of how to balance responsibility among national, state, and local authority to a focus that recognizes that the student is the producer of educational outcomes.

The basic premises of special education will be reconsidered, and I believe, rejected, in this generation of reform. These premises include: first, the premise that instructional needs warrant a dual system of education. Handicapped children and so-called normal children are sufficiently different as to need separate programs, separate classes, and even special schools. This, we have come to believe is an error in conceptualization (Sarason, 1982). There are not two distinct types of children, Needs of children fall on a continuum and there is no useful purpose for the present dichotomy. Now, this is going to be very hard. We have spent many years developing this system where we persuaded regular teachers that the needs of the handicapped were so unique as to require the very special brand of education only we as special educators could provide. Now we are going to come back and say, " No, we changed

our minds. These children will be best served by you in your classroom with my help and support". We should anticipate an attitude of suspicion from our colleagues. This suggestion of a new role for the regular teacher will, of course, be added to someone already beleaguered and faced with problems that range from overcrowded classrooms to gangs and violence in the schools.

Premise 2 is that the dual system is efficient (Stainback, Stainback, & Bunch, 1989). We have come to believe, and I might add quite painfully, that this is not the case. The system of classification alone has a price tag that is staggering. And, of course, we know that there is substantial duplication of programs, services, and materials. Much could be saved, including both fiscal and human resources from a unified, rather than a segregated, dual system.

The third premise is one of attitude. Let me phrase this in reverse. The dual system fosters an inappropriate attitude by all involved. We have developed a charitable attitude toward the handicapped. They are viewed as special charity cases who are given special programs because they are needy and have a special condition. In a merged system this attitude would not prevail. A system where each child is provided for according to his need will be viewed as more fair, more normal, and expected.

This third generation of reform will put children at the center, emphasize their needs, and focus on student outcomes. A number of key elements are needed to ensure the success of this reform. The first is that children will be viewed relative to their strengths rather than using our present deficit model. It might be said that this is an approach that has more respect for children in that the model that tracks children and separates them based on their problems is inherently one of less respect. Only when children are viewed as positive contributors, as individuals who have worth, can they be expected to achieve and be successful in their school experience and in their lives generally.

The second element is to actively engage students in the learning process. Most of the reform proposed up to now gives the student a passive role: they are the object of teaching and the recipient of some new approach. The third generation will be structured to make children active and engaged in their learning. Students must be given control over the learning process. We must recognize that students and their abilities are the outcomes of education and as such they must buy into the process in a very significant way. It is much easier to be an authoritarian and to be very directive in what we do. However, as we believe for ourselves; so must we believe for children,. The outcomes will be better and attitudes will be more positive when students are active, have control, and see their learning as fundamental to their own needs rather than as a response to a disjointed set of adult expectations.

Now, this is not a particularly radical proposal. Attempts to engage children in more meaningful ways in their own learning are not new. What might be new here is the inclusion of handicapped children in this scenario. Our inclination to protect special children;

something that easily becomes overprotective and even can become repressive, will need to undergo careful scrutiny if children with disabilities are to benefit from this particular initiative.

The third generation of reform will promote a single, unitary, integrated system of education for all children. There will be no tracks, no special classes, or segregated schools. When children participate in their learning together; when no one is excluded; we will all be the better for it. Just as we were unable to justify the various kinds of segregation that emerged throughout the history of our nation that have always been reflected in our schools, race and language being notable examples; we are also unable to justify a dual system that basically rejects some children by separating them on the premise that their needs are so different that they cannot be served in a regular class. Well, I challenge you to consider what it is exactly that we cannot deliver in a regular class. If we think through the issues and reject the notion that because someone will resist or does not want to be involved in the process, or even that parents will oppose this exposure of their children to danger or abuse, there is very little that we can say justifies the exclusion of a child from the mainstream of education.

The stigma of separation; the emotional impact of being considered so different as to be excluded or set aside, is sufficiently harmful, sufficiently devastating to the self esteem and feelings of self-worth of a child as to negate whatever benefits might be expected to accrue from the services that we provide. Now, this is an emotional statement. Let me reframe this and use a more bottom line approach. What we are doing now, this dual system, is costing us an arm and a leg, and it does not look like we are getting much for our money. At this point I should also mention another change that I have observed and perhaps you have as well. And that is that special education is no longer a sacred cow, an untouchable, so to speak. The laws supporting special education always appeared sufficiently imposing as to discourage any serious challenges. This is no longer the case. If you have not heard from your superintendent or your school board, you will. How can we control costs? Are there any economies that can be identified? This change in attitude is one that we cannot afford to ignore.

Now, to what might we attribute the tremendous resistance to much of what we call reform in special education? Special education has been likened to a social movement. By definition, a social movement is in jeopardy when it becomes successful. The social psychology literature tells us that successful social movements become conservative, draw boundaries to protect hard-won turf, and lose urgency (Lilly & Smith, 1980). The definition of success does not necessarily mean success for children in this scenario. It might only mean a successful professional career or an extensive system or bureaucracy that employs many people. I think you can see or anticipate the reaction of special educators generally, and teachers specifically, in this characterization.

I have been working with a number of districts on their reform efforts over the past several years, and to say that restructuring special education is a mine field, would be putting it mildly. Invariably, a teacher will take offense at the very suggestion that we are not doing

the very best that we can do for handicapped children. If there are any problems they are ones caused by administrators and their lack of vision and insight, not any lack of effort on our part (meaning teachers). This typical teacher will say, "I care about my children; I am working very hard (or at least dancing as fast as I can); Our students are happy about what they receive in special education"; and "They no longer suffer the slings and arrows of being in regular education where no ones cares about them as individuals or about their educational needs". This story can frequently turn into a 2 or 3 kleenex story. I ask , "But what about the data?"; "What about the fact that once they leave your protection, things don't seem to be going well?". This is usually met with either silence or some indignant or personal challenge to prove that what I say is true; or this might be true somewhere else, but not here; or just plain, I don't believe you at all. The implication is that I am a college professor and I have lost touch with what goes on in the public schools or more likely that I have lost touch with reality entirely. Well, all the huff and puff in the world is not going to change the situation that we find ourselves in. No longer can we take the position that placing a child in special education, particularly when it is a borderline case, is in fact erring in his or her behalf. Special education has become a life sentence. It is very difficult to escape. And when you do exit, you are apparently not prepared for anything in particular. Your prospects for life after school are dismal.

Now what to do? How can we participate in this third generation of school reform? How shall we restructure special education?

To me, restructuring represents such an exciting opportunity because it allows us to redefine ourselves and what we are all about. As a special educator and an administrator, I am particularly pleased with what finally appears to be our chance to participate in the school reform movement. The needs of children with disabilities are now part of the mix when considering how what we do in our public schools might be changed to better serve the needs of all children. Moreover, including these children and their special needs in our restructuring efforts will help drive the goals and ultimately the form that these efforts will take.

Make no mistake. The school reform movement is a direct outgrowth of the fact that our schools need to change because what we are doing does not work as well as the public thinks it should. I am sure you have heard this statement before, probably from your neighbor, and certainly in the media. Likewise, the push to restructure special education is also based on a lack of success. One interesting difference is that the challenge to special education is coming from inside the profession unlike the schools who are generally under fire from the public and the media. I interpret this difference as an opportunity to make the needed changes in special education outside the spotlight. It is my hope that this lack of pressure will allow a conversation that is calmer and more reasonable.

I believe that we still have the opportunity to control our own destiny in the restructuring of special education. I do not know how long this window of opportunity will last, so we better use it while we can.

I believe that all children can learn. I believe that most teachers can teach. Our problem appears to be in how these two elements come together. Though teaching is certainly as much art as science, I am still persuaded that we must use our research to inform our decisions about change and restructuring. Now, I am sure that you have heard a wide variety of speakers who approach the topic of change in perhaps a more positive way. You will probably even have some of these speakers today. As a matter of fact, I shared the stage with a restructuring cheerleader at a recent workshop for teachers. At the end of the day he was much more popular than I. He had given them better jokes; he had better overheads; he was even a more polished and personable speaker. I, on the other hand, framed the issues in a way that made the solutions appear to be very, very difficult. Even thinking about them might give you a headache. I did not make them laugh; I did not do a little cooperative learning exercise; and I do not think he had moved us any closer to the task at hand by the end of the day. It is my belief that we have talked about simple solutions for too long. We have talked about change without making any, for too long. Every approach we make is like putting your big toe in cold water. Just a little; do not challenge me too much; do not push or make me uncomfortable or; I do not mind a little staff development, but do not ask me for too much. I am here to tell you today that this will not do. We are going to have to jump in, all the way, once and for all.

I keep a book on my shelf, less for the content, than for its title. It is called *Coming Back or Never Leaving*. It captures what I would like to close with today. We should end the discussion about how to mainstream handicapped children in regular classes. This is *coming back*. Rather, it is my position that they should stay in regular education, never be removed, and have their needs met in this setting. It will be in the best interests of children, and as such, it will be in the best interests of those of us in the profession.

My subtitle here is Summary/Challenge, because I believe it is both. I believe that we must discontinue our use of labels for children. These labels create categories that are neither of much instructional use or of value for individual children. We spend an enormous amount of money on this process and the return on this investment is limited. I believe that we should measure our own success by measuring student outcomes. When these outcomes are not what they should be, we should look at our own efforts rather than looking at the child. We should be willing to evaluate the services that we provide and make changes when our students are not experiencing success. Another program that I work with called Reading Recovery uses this model with great success (Pinnell, Fried, & Estice,1991). Teachers are not afraid to be held accountable for what they do when we have a system in place that works. The dual system of education should be replaced by one unified system for all children. Regular education and special education should be merged. Though this concept is easier to understand and visualize when you think of children with mild disabilities, I also mean to include the moderate and severe in this unified system. Just as I cannot imagine a family that would exclude or isolate a child because of a disability (imagine a separate room for this child to play in or watch TV in away from his brothers and sisters; imagine separate trips just for this one child and other trips for the siblings); I cannot imagine continuing a school system

that does not fully include children with disabilities. Schools must become friendlier places that are more respectful of children. If we focus on children's strengths rather than their deficits; if we give them control over their own learning; if we ensure access to a curriculum that is meaningful; then I think our success will follow. We should not underestimate either our regular or special teachers. They have the talent. It is our job to help show the way. This is I believe, our challenge, and I am confident of our ability to meet it.

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